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ABSTRACT

This publication consists of an essay entitled "Managerialism and the Academic Profession: The Case of England," by Martin Trow, along with a commentary on the essay by Paul Clark. Trow argues that over the past decade British higher education has undergone a more profound reorientation than any other system among industrial societies. Conservative governments since 1979 have utilized "managerialism" to more directly control universities, linking funding to outside assessments of research and teaching quality. This has weakened the autonomy of British universities and led to mistrust between the government and educators. The essay concludes that valid assessment of teaching and research can only be accomplished by the universities themselves. Clark's commentary questions many of the assertions made in Trow's essay, maintaining that the current system of research and teaching assessment was created with the input of the universities and that the assessment committees are largely composed of academics from the universities. (MDM)

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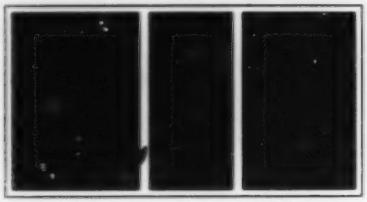

QUALITY SUPPORT CENTRE

ED 373 667

# *Managerialism and the Academic Profession: Quality and Control*

*by Martin Trow*
*Graduate School of Public Policy*
*University of California, Berkeley*

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# *Managerialism and the Academic Profession: Quality and Control*

*by Martin Trow*
*with a commentary by Paul Clark*

***Quality Support Centre***
***Higher Education Report No 2***

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# Managerialism and the Academic Profession: Quality and Control

## Foreword

This is the second in a series of reports published by the Quality Support Centre (QSC) of the Open University on issues concerned with quality in higher education.

QSC was formed out of the research, development and information services of the Council for National Academic Awards at the end of 1992. It seeks to provide an independent voice on questions of quality in higher education. As well as publications it undertakes projects and consultancy work and provides an annual programme of conferences and workshops on higher education themes.

For further information about the work of QSC, contact either John Brennan (Head of Centre) or Tarla Shah (Centre Administrator) at the Quality Support Centre, The Open University, 344-354 Gray's Inn Road, London WC1X 8BP, tel: (0) 71 278 4411, fax: (0) 71 837 0290.

# QSC Higher Education Report No 2

## *Managerialism and the Academic Profession: Quality and Control*

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# Managerialism and the Academic Profession: Quality and Control

## Preface

It is a little over a year since new arrangements for the external assessment of teaching quality were introduced into British higher education. The long-term effects of quality assessment may not be known but it is possible to see in its introduction the latest stage of a process which has over the last fifteen years been shifting decisively the balance between academic autonomy and public accountability in higher education.

In the following essay, Martin Trow elaborates this view and considers some of the *dangers* for quality in higher education that arise from the current forms of quality assessment. In a commentary on Professor Trow's thesis, Dr Paul Clark, Director of Quality Assessment at the Higher Education Funding Council for England, points to some of the *benefits* of quality assessment.

What both contributions do is to remind us that current debates about the assessment of quality in higher education are about much more than the meeting of external bureaucratic requirements: they are about the purposes of mass systems of higher education and the institutional cultures and structural arrangements through which they are to be achieved.

Martin Trow is Professor of Public Policy at the Graduate School of Public Policy, University of California at Berkeley. He has published many books and articles on higher education policy.

Paul Clark joined the Higher Education Funding Council for England as Director of Quality Assessment at the end of 1993. Previously he was Dean of Science at the Open University where he has worked for the last 20 years.

# *Managerialism and the Academic Profession: The Case of England*

*Martin Trow*

*This paper is a revised version of one presented to a conference on* ***The Quality Debate****, sponsored by the Times Higher Education Supplement, and held on 24 September 1993. The paper is an early report of research on the impact of central government policy on British universities, being carried out by the author in collaboration with Professor Oliver Fulton of Lancaster University and Professor Tony Becher of the University of Sussex.*

*My thanks to the Suntory/Toyota Centre for Economics and Related Disciplines and the Department of Sociology, London School of Economics, for their help and support during the preparation of this paper.*

# Introduction

Since the second World War the central problem for higher education in most Western industrial societies has been how to transform the small elite university systems of the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries into the systems of mass higher education required to meet the growing demands both for wider access from segments of their societies, and for more highly trained and educated workers from their labour markets. The pressures for expansion have varied in intensity among the major European countries, as have the responses to that demand by European governments. (The U.S. for various historical reasons is a marked exception here.) But on the whole, it is fair to say that the U.K. has moved more slowly than most modern societies toward mass higher education; it is only in the past few years that it has started firmly down that path. Moreover, it has done so not by allowing its universities to grow greatly in size, or by creating permanent parallel non-university systems, but by promoting to full university status first the university colleges, then the regional colleges (some first to colleges of advanced technology and then to universities); still other regional colleges have recently (1991) become universities after a delay of a quarter of a century as polytechnics. That pattern of expansion poses special problems for the research universities in the emerging system of mass higher education, as we will see.

Over the past 10 or 12 years British higher education has undergone a more profound reorientation than any other system in industrial societies. One aspect of that revolution has been the emergence of "managerialism" in the governance and direction of British universities. I suggest that "managerialism" as understood by central government in Britain is a substitute for a relationship of trust between government and universities, trust in the ability of the institutions of higher education to broadly govern themselves. The chosen managerial mechanisms in the U.K. currently are assessments of the "quality" of the teaching and research done in universities, carried out by committees and individuals appointed by the central funding agency, and linked directly to funding. It is not difficult to see that the character

and criteria of these assessments will have great influence on the direction and work of the universities and departments being assessed. I want to raise the question of how effective this policy is and is likely to be, and what consequences for the life of British higher education seem to follow from it. It may be that other countries, and not least my own, have something to learn from the British experience.

# The concept of "managerialism"

What do we mean by "managerialism"? It is not just a concern for the effective management of specific institutions in specific situations. The "ism" points to an ideology, to a faith or belief in the truth of a set of ideas which are independent of specific situations. Managerialism as applied to the institutions of British higher education takes two distinct forms, a soft and a hard concept. The soft concept sees managerial effectiveness as an important element in the provision of higher education of high quality at lowest cost; it is focused around the idea of improving the "efficiency" of the existing institutions. The hard conception elevates institutional and system management to a dominant position in higher education; its advocates argue that higher education must be reshaped and reformed by the introduction of management systems which then become a continuing force ensuring the steady improvement in the provision of higher education. In this conception management would provide this continuing improvement in quality and efficiency (i.e. cost) through the establishment of criteria and mechanisms for the continual assessment of the outcomes of educational activities, and the consequent reward and punishment of institutions and primary units of education through formulas linking these assessments to funding.[1]

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[1] The Government's White Paper, *Higher Education: A New Framework* (1991), is a document of hard managerialism: a brief collection of assertions and instructions to the academic community, wholly without argument or evidence for the policies it sets forth. (Indeed, on first reading I took it to be the Executive Summary of a longer paper which provided the evidence, argument and context for the policies, but found none). Its character can be suggested by the fact that this authoritative document speaks of a 50 per cent growth in enrolments in British universities by the year 2000, and devotes no fewer than 28 numbered paragraphs to the issue of "quality assurance", while saying nothing about capital investment in laboratories, libraries, classrooms or equipment during this anticipated growth. (See Trow, "Thoughts on the White Paper of 1991", *Higher Education Quarterly*, vol. 46, no. 3, pp. 213-226.)

If the White Paper of 1991 is a statement of hard managerialism, the Jarratt Report (CVCP, 1985) was for British higher education the defining document of soft managerialism, a reaction by academic and professional administrators

Those who hold the soft conception of "managerialism"— on the whole senior administrators and some academics in the universities themselves — are critical of at least some of the norms and attitudes that have marked British universities and academics in the past: their complacency and conservatism, their administrative inefficiency, their indifference to establishing links with industry and commerce or to broadening access to larger sectors of the population. Nevertheless, the "soft" managerialists still see higher education as an autonomous activity, governed by its own norms and traditions, with a more effective and rationalised management still serving functions defined by the academic community itself. By contrast, those holding the hard conception of managerialism, people on the whole in government and business rather than in the universities themselves, have no such trust in the wisdom of the academic community, and are resolved to reshape and redirect the activities of that community through funding formulas and other mechanisms of accountability imposed from outside the academic community, management mechanisms created and largely shaped for application to large commercial enterprises. Business models are central to the hard conception of managerialism; when applied to higher education, as the current government does, the commitment is to transform universities into organisations similar enough to ordinary commercial firms so that they can be assessed and managed in roughly similar ways.

This "hard" concept of managerialism is currently the dominant force reshaping British higher education day by day and week by week. Its two characteristics of greatest interest to the present analysis are: (i) the withdrawal of trust by government in the academic community, and in its capacity to critically assess its own activities and improve them; and (ii) its need to find or create a "bottom line" that performs the function of a

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to the deep cuts in university funding of the early 1980s. It called for the strengthening and rationalising of university administration, a goal that has been substantially achieved since its publication.

profit and loss sheet for commercial business. This "bottom line", if it could be found or created, would allow top managers in government departments and funding agencies to identify and assess the strengths and weaknesses of an enterprise (a university), its strong and weak units, and serve as an analytical tool for the continual improvement of the product and the lowering of unit costs.[2]

In brief, then, the withdrawal of trust in its universities by the British government has forced it to create bureaucratic machinery and formulas to steer and manage the universities from outside the system. In the absence of an effective competitive market, effectively precluded by government policies, bureaucratic institutions and their mechanisms are the alternative to a relationship of trust between state and universities. The bureaucratic agencies then create criteria of performance, and rules for reporting and accountability necessary for the assessment of the system and its primary units (i.e. academic departments), and for the application of the formulas linking assessed "quality" and funding. These links of assessment to funding are intended to ensure the automatic improvement of the efficiency and effectiveness of the higher education industry. In British higher education policy, external assessment linked to funding is thus a substitute not only for

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[2] Another illustration of "hard managerialism", as well as an indication of the Government's lack of trust in the academic community, can be seen in the chief consultative document commissioned by the HEFCE on "possible ways for institutions to account for the use of research funds allocated to them by the Funding Council". The report was prepared by a firm of accountants and business consultants, and written by men none of whom was an academic. Moreover, the study was "overseen" by a "Steering Group" of 16 persons, all of them civil servants or university administrators, no single one of whom was currently engaged either in research or teaching. A more dramatic statement of attitudes toward the academic community which actually does the research the document is discussing could hardly be imagined. This lack of trust is visible also in the document's recommendations, one of which is that a detailed record of time spent on each of six types of activities be kept and reported by each academic researcher, and linked to funding. (*Research Accountability*, Coopers and Lybrand, for the Higher Education Funding Council for England, n.d. but 1992.)

trust but also for the effective competitive market which is the chief control both of quality and cost in commercial enterprises.

Here I want to raise three questions:

(i) Why was it that the government led by Margaret Thatcher which came to power in 1979, and its successor which is still in power in the U.K., have withdrawn trust from the universities, and undertaken the radical reforms in organisation and funding that we have seen over the past decade?

(ii) What are some of the consequences of this withdrawal of trust for the universities?

(iii) What are some of the assumptions underlying current central government policy in the U.K., and how do those assumptions accord with the realities of academic life, particularly the realities of teaching and research?

These are broad questions and I could not possibly answer them adequately here. I can only point in the directions in which answers might be found.

# British higher education before the Thatcher government

With the election of the government headed by Margaret Thatcher in 1979, the attitudes and policies of the British government towards the country's institutions of higher education changed dramatically and profoundly as compared with the policies of previous governments. Before World War II British universities, taken all in all, received about a third of their operating expenses from central government, raising the rest from tuition payments, local governmental subsidies, and, especially important for Oxford and Cambridge, from endowments old and new. After World War II, the spirit of democratisation, the expansion of the welfare state under both Labour and Conservative governments, and growing belief that national strength and prosperity depended in part on its educated manpower, led the state to take a more active role in the expansion and support of the universities and of other institutions of higher education, some of which became universities in the 1960s and others of which became polytechnics in the 1970s and universities in the 1990s. By 1951-52 the state was providing roughly three-quarters of the universities' income, and had assumed the bulk of student fees and student support grants. By 1970 that proportion had grown to nearly 90 per cent.

During this period, that is, from 1945 to 1981, the central institution for funding the universities was the University Grants Committee (UGC), created in 1919 precisely to serve as the buffer between the universities, "autonomous" in intellectual matters under the royal charters, and the state, which provided a substantial part of their support. And the UGC continued to serve this function during a period of substantial growth in British higher education. While the overall size and shape of the "system" was determined by central government — as for example, the decision to elevate the Colleges of Advanced Technology to university status in 1963, and the parallel decision to create a group of "new universities" during the period 1958-63 — still central government did not intervene in

the internal life of the universities it helped to create and pay for. In both parties and all governments it was accepted that British universities were among the finest in the world, and as a unique system of elite institutions of higher education perhaps pre-eminent. Knowledgeable foreign observers of the British universities before the Thatcher era broadly agreed on three major points: (i) they were unexcelled as teaching institutions at the first degree level; (ii) they were distinguished research institutions, whose provisions for systematic graduate instruction varied among disciplines, but was gradually improving; but (iii) the society had not found a fully satisfactory way to provide mass higher education with broad access alongside the highly selective elite universities, though the creation and encouragement of the polytechnics was a major step in that direction if their tendencies toward institutional drift could be constrained through the binary system.

The years leading up to the Thatcher victory saw British governments struggling with the mounting costs of the university system while dealing with an economy that had never fully recovered from the War — or perhaps from the two Wars. Nevertheless, while previous governments had asked, rather politely, whether the universities could not find ways of providing more education for less money, the universities continued to submit budgets through the UGC that reflected per capita cost levels matched only by the most affluent private liberal arts colleges and universities in the United States — cost levels that were reflected in average student/staff ratios of about 8:1 across the board.

# The Thatcher revolution

The government led by Margaret Thatcher which came to power in 1979 broke in fundamental ways with its predecessors in its relations with the universities as in other areas of public life — though it took some time for the universities to understand the depth of the change. Mrs Thatcher and her ministers of education had a fundamentally different view of the nature of the universities than their own leaders, and a quite different conception of their future. Their views, as they evolved over the next decade, can be summarised thus:

(a) British universities are backward, conservative, self-serving institutions, and are in part responsible for Britain's poor performance in the international competition for markets. In brief, they, along with the trades unions, the state-owned industries, and the professions generally, are among the established institutions that impede Britain's economic progress.

(b) British universities, like other established institutions, are incapable of reform from within, but must be forced to reshape their roles, missions and functions. This conception of the failings of British universities still guides central government policy.

(c) Initially, the transformation of British higher education was to be accomplished by radically cutting their budgets, forcing them to seek new funds from sources outside of government. That in turn would require them to become more efficient administratively, and require a measure of rationalisation of their internal operations to be achieved by pressure from the (then) Department of Education and Science, with the help and advice of lay and business groups. These views, largely an expression of the soft or weak version of managerialism mentioned above, were captured in the Jarratt Report of 1985.[3]

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[3] Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals, *Report of the Steering Committee for Efficiency Studies in Universities*, March 1985.

(d) Progressively declining support from central government would also make the universities more responsive to the real requirements of "the market", and most especially of business and industry who employ their graduates.

(e) While in the long run one could hope that better internal management and the sharp disciplines of "the market" and its climate of competition would force the universities to become both more efficient and more "relevant", in the short and medium term central government would still be supplying a substantial part of both operating and capital costs of the universities. That insulation from market forces — required by the traditions of British higher education and the practical impossibilities of cutting them loose overnight — meant that central government would have to administer its support grants in ways that encouraged the continuing reform of the universities, and did not provide subsidies for a return to the bad old ways.

Therefore, (and here emerges the hard version of managerialism), continuing support by central government of the universities would have to be accompanied by policies and regulations that would prod the universities to greater efficiency and relevance. Among the policies laid down by government were:

(i) The abolition of the UGC and its replacement by "Funding Councils", initially separate for the universities and the polytechnics, and then combined when the polytechnics were granted university status in 1992. The new Higher Education Funding Councils (HEFCs)[4] are not intended to serve, like the UGC, as a buffer between government and the universities, to protect the autonomy and independence of the universities from government and political pressure.

[4] There are separate funding councils for England, Scotland and Wales. They follow broadly similar policies, but with some differences in implementation. In this paper I am speaking chiefly of the Funding Council for England which governs the bulk of British higher education.

On the contrary, and quite explicitly, they are an arm of government, an instrument for the implementation of government policy on universities which, in government's view, are by their nature and traditions recalcitrant, and tend to defend their own parochial interests against the national interest as defined by the government of the day.

(ii) The separation of funding for teaching and research, and the institution of separate assessments by committees of academics appointed by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) of each set of activities at the departmental level.

(iii) These separate assessments, of teaching and research, linked to funding, are intended to introduce a measure of competitiveness into university life and thought that had been absent during the UGC regime of assured block grants. They would thus function, especially in the context of level or reduced funding, as a kind of quasi-market, with the inherent disciplines of market processes on the economy and efficiency of the producing units. But it is a peculiar market, a firmly rigged market. It leaves central government and its officials (rather than the student "consumers") to decide both on the quality of university activities and on the criteria by which those judgements are made. Moreover, government sets the prices of places, subject by subject, for fully funded students, and also decides on that year's fees, and allows universities to bid for places at or below those prices. The elevation of the polytechnics more than doubled the number of suppliers, but reduced the number of buyers in the market effectively to one — very convenient for the buyer. What we have is the rhetoric of "the market", coupled with a substantial increase in the power of the external assessing and funding agencies, marking a real shift in power in the world of British higher education.

Other changes introduced by the present Government — for example, the abolition of tenure in academic appointments — are aspects of the new relation between government and the universities, part of the effort to transform the universities into something more like commercial enterprises. But they lie outside the scope of this paper.

# The assessment of research

British universities currently get their support grants from central government through what is called a "dual system" of funding research and teaching separately, as if they were distinct activities. That is a system that could only have been invented by non-academics. People who actually teach and do research in universities know how deeply research interests, and even more, research perspectives, are brought into teaching, and how much of the teaching of post-graduate students and increasingly of undergraduates is done through participating in their research and drawing them into one's own. The sharp separation of funding for teaching and research in the provision of general support for departments and universities is simply at odds with the realities of academic life. And the further that policy retreats from the realities for which it is designed, the more distorted must be its effects.

But setting this important issue aside, there remain the policies themselves: the separate assessments of the research and teaching activities of academics in English universities, in ways designed to determine how much money their departments and, in the aggregate, their universities will be given annually by central government. It is important to stress that what is being assessed are not individuals or universities, but departments. The allocations resulting from these assessments are made known to the departments that have been assessed, which of course strengthens their claim on those allocations to the detriment of the authority of the vice-chancellor and the integrity of the university. The effects, of course, are variable among the universities.

We are accustomed to assessing specific research projects and outcomes along a single yardstick of excellence — an amalgam of elegance, predictive power, scholarly scope, effect on a field of study, imaginative grasp of large bodies of information. But whatever the possibilities for assessing particular research proposals and projects, the assessment of the research performance of whole departments in the British universities has peculiar unintended consequences. Among them, we find, is a

tendency for department heads to encourage their colleagues to teach less and write more, and in some fields, to encourage research with short-term outcomes rather than long-range studies. The conversion of the polytechnics into full-fledged universities also seems to be bringing into the research community numbers of academics who have never done research, and are not adequately prepared to do it.[5] Moreover, the assessments centre on the aggregate output of the members of a department who are actually doing research, which leads to subtle judgements by department heads about whether to "count" as members of their "research staff" members of the department whose research productivity is (at least at the moment) low in their reports to the funding council. (Two identical departments will be differently funded depending on how they report their staff.) The pressures on long-time members of a department who are not thus counted can be imagined. Moreover, the assessment procedures cannot tell (or differentially respond to) whether a department is, in research terms, becoming stronger or weaker, or whether its research output and reputation rests on the work of a few "stars" or is more widely distributed among its members. In short, the assessments cannot tell much about the actual life of the department as a centre and context for research.

There are even more fundamental questions about the research assessment exercise in the U.K. as a basis for funding departments and universities, not least its unexamined assumption that research strength should be rewarded with more support, research weakness with less. At the University of California at Berkeley, the discovery of serious deficiencies in the research quality of some of its departments of biology in the early 1980s led to a major study and reform of the organisation of biology at the University, a reform involving major investments

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[5] The provision of work-shops and start-up funds to encourage research in the former polytechnics may be welcomed by some in the former polytechnics, but it encourages institutional drift (a perennial problem for British higher education), and also could seem to be at odds with the Government's announced intention to concentrate research funds in a small number of "centres of excellence".

both in buildings and people.[6] The question of whether to respond to research weakness with more support or less is properly a decision to be taken in light of a close study of the particular department, faculty or institute and its problems, not by the mechanical operation of a funding formula driven by a research ranking of a department on a scale from 1 to 5. The energies spent by British administrators and academics in manipulating the formula to generate the greatest sum locally —some of which involve what might be called "creative accounting" or colloquially "scams"— might better be spent on more productive activity. The withdrawal of trust by government from the universities has led to the parallel withdrawal of trust by universities in government, and from a co-operative to an adversarial relationship, and inevitably, the manipulation of information and data going up the line. That in turn may call forth more audits and site visits, calling forth more ingenious defensive behaviour in the universities, and so forth.

The managerialists in central government appear to have little understanding of the actual processes of university administration. The enormous burden of the forms and reports that flow down to the universities, of dubious value to any conceivable policy, suggests that they do not know or much care about the administrative costs they impose on the universities, or the hidden effects of the "opportunity costs" to academics of doing anything that is subject to the increasingly elaborate processes of accountability established by the funding councils[7].

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[6] Martin Trow, "Leadership and Organisation: The Case of Biology at Berkeley", in Rune Premfors, ed., *Higher Education Organisation: Conditions for Policy Implementation*, Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell International, 1984, pp. 148-178.

[7] Similarly, "The existence of trust economises on transaction costs". Janet T. Landa, "Culture and Entrepreneurship in Less-Developed Countries: Ethnic Trading Networks as Economic Organisations", in Brigitte Berger, The Culture of Entrepreneurship, San Francisco: ICS Publishers, 1991, pp. 53-72. Conversely, the withdrawal or absence of trust greatly increases transaction costs. But these transaction and opportunity costs, in time, money, or other things not done, are mostly hidden, and not included in Government's estimations of institutional efficiency or effectiveness.

I do not get the sense that this Government have ever taken as a problem the implementation of their policies in and by the universities; they have more or less taken for granted that the policies and procedures they promulgate will be obeyed and implemented by university administrators, as in other areas of public life. (It made a similar mistake about implementation in 1993 with respect to its policies mandating a range of central examinations for students in primary and secondary education.) But universities differ from most other areas of the social services (though not all, e.g. the health service) in that much power is inherently exercised by the academics at the "bottom" of the chain of authority. Moreover, the "services" provided in and by higher education are enormously diverse, and resist conformity to any broad and general rules. If government policy has provided the motives for institutional resistance, the nature of the institutions and of academic life itself provides the opportunities and resources.

## The assessment of teaching

But if the assessment of the research qualities of whole departments rather than individual scholars or proposals raises a host of difficulties and unanticipated outcomes, the external assessment of the quality of a department's teaching probably rests on a basic misconception of what teaching is about. The assumptions of managerialism have come to dominate discussions about teaching. Some English academics remark that they need to be reminded about the actual nature of what they do, even if that is at odds with the assumptions of the assessments. The fundamental problem of trying to assess teaching lies in the assumption that it is one kind of activity, and excellence in it one kind of excellence. But teaching involves at least two parties, teachers and the taught. The quality of teaching is not a quality of a teacher but of a relationship, aspects of which are defined by the character, talents and motivations of the learners. Teaching is not an action but a transaction; not an outcome but a process; not a performance, but an emotional and intellectual connection between teacher and learner. Therefore it cannot be assessed as an attribute or skill of a teacher or a department, independent of the learners who have their own characteristics which affect whether and how much they learn (about what) from a particular teacher, and indeed, how much he learns from them. That also means, among other things, that "teaching" cannot be assessed along any single dimension of "quality", nor can it be assessed at all without deep knowledge of its setting, of the styles and orientations of the teachers, of the character and diversity of students, and of its long-term effects, effects which may be very different from what students report about teaching as they experience it.

In fact, the quality of teaching, which surely means an assessment of its effects on students, can hardly be "assessed" at all in the short-term. What can be assessed is not "teaching" but the absence of teaching, as when people do not meet their classes, or substitute such things as political or religious views and doctrines for teaching. We can and should pay attention to

how much teaching people do, both formally and informally, whether they actually get to their meetings with students sober and on time, read and respond to their written work, and the like. We can also expect and require that teachers in their formal relationships with students confine their teaching to their areas of professional competence — and need not approve teachers who exploit their privileged positions and the vulnerability of their students in the service of some sectarian positions or political or social doctrine. Moreover, we can be responsive to students' complaints about teachers who verbally abuse them, express racial or gender prejudice, or simply treat them disrespectfully. We can demand of university lecturers professional responsibility toward their jobs and a humane non-exploitative relationship with their students. But beyond that, we must depend on our appointment procedures to ensure that teachers know their subjects and are competent to transmit knowledge, or broaden perspectives, or stimulate curiosity, or raise ambitions, or prepare students to be able to learn throughout their lifetimes, or achieve some of the many other things that teachers accomplish through their relationships with students. And we need strong clear internal procedures of review of the crucial processes and relationships to ensure that the standards that the university sets for itself are being met — and if not, why not.

All this means that almost everything in a university depends on the inner motivations of teachers — their sense of pride, their intellectual involvement with their subjects, their professional commitments to the role of teacher, their love of students, or of learning — these and others are among the forces that lead teachers to bring their full resources to the teaching relationships. And these motivations of academics are usually quite independent of unpredictable external assessments, and the remote incentives and punishments that can be attached to them.

But the withdrawal of trust by government in the universities means that it is not prepared to accept the "inner motivations of teachers" as an adequate basis for motivating and directing their behaviour. That is precisely the basis on which all professions, not least the academic profession, have claimed a measure of autonomy over their spheres of competence. But if, as I believe,

this Government is (and for a decade or more has been) deeply dissatisfied with the performance of its universities, then justifications of the autonomy and self-direction of academics and their institutions by reference to the primacy of inner "professional" norms and motivations are seen as merely expressions of a familiar academic rhetoric which has defended and justified the self-serving and unsatisfactory performance of its institutions in the past.

But if it cannot trust the inner motivations of scholars, scientists and professionals (and they are not all exactly the same, though similar in springing from inner values), how can government shape the behaviours of academics and thus of their institutions?

One way, and the first employed, was simply to cut the budgets for the universities drastically. That certainly got the attention of the academics, and has affected their behaviour even without directly influencing their inner motivations. As student/staff ratios have roughly doubled over the decade, activities and relationships which were possible a decade ago become less easy or impossible now; class sizes grow, tutorials are phased out, and behaviours of academics and institutions are affected in other ways that are less obvious. No one, to my knowledge, has "assessed" the impact of the changing ratio of students to staff in British universities over this past decade, nor is the question even asked. The only aspect of university life that seems to be immune to "assessment" is the quality and wisdom of central government policy toward higher education.

But it is not enough to cut budgets. So long as academics have substantial control over their own time, they may or may not actually work harder, more efficiently and more effectively, as Government thinks they should. In the Government's view, the way to get more efficient and effective behaviour out of employees is to generate a competitive environment for the academics, and then begin to tie rewards to more effective performance on the job. Or put differently, it is to replace what it sees as inadequate and self-serving inner motivations with a system of externally provided incentives and penalties keyed to approved performance. This linkage of performance to external rewards cannot exist side by side with the older structure of

internal motivations, which to the Government was indifferent to (the Government's conception of) the public interest, but was keyed rather to the special interests of the academic guild and its institutions and prejudices. So the problem presented itself: how to replace one structure of motivations — rooted in the traditional patterns of academic life — by a different structure of motivations whose source and model was the competitive world of private enterprise. This problem, articulated the more clearly the longer the Government remained in office, led to the emergence of the two forms of managerialism to which I referred earlier. The "soft" and "hard" forms of managerialism correspond roughly to two phases of the managerial revolution in British higher education; the first that developed within the universities under the pressures of coping with the huge budget cuts of the early 1980s, and the second, which developed, after the demise of the UGC, around the central government funding agency, now the HEFC(E), aiming at introducing businesslike attitudes toward work and performance into the universities, changing their functions as it changes the motivations of their employees, not merely introducing more efficient rationalised structures of management as in the first phase.

The new philosophers of higher education in and around government were faced with a number of problems: one, obviously, was the deeply entrenched attitudes and arrangements within universities that were based on quite different norms and values, and indeed held the norms and values of business in some contempt, as least as they were applied to the universities. These traditional academic norms and values were much more deeply embedded in the "older" universities; indeed, there is a clear if not perfect relationship between how deeply embedded those traditional notions of institutional governance are and how old a particular university is. But those traditional values of autonomy were on the whole less firmly embedded in the polytechnics, which had always had less autonomy, and were, so to speak, used to substantial influence from local authorities, local industry, and later on, from the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA). Putting the polytechnics on a "businesslike basis" would have seemed to politicians and civil servants an easier and more realistic mission than

accomplishing the same transformation in the universities. And the notion of keeping the polytechnics a separate sector, more responsive to political and external direction, must have seemed attractive to some observers in and around government.

Despite these and other advantages, the political costs of maintaining the binary system would have been high. First, there was the steady pressure from polytechnic directors and councils themselves: having phased out the CNAA oversight, the polytechnics were giving degrees and even doing research. How then could they be withheld the title and status of "university"? But if "universities", then how could they be distinguished from all other universities; would that not be precisely the invidious distinction on status (ultimately class-linked) grounds to which British education has been subjected since its origins? Not only would abolishing the binary line appeal to the polytechnics, and even to many university academics, guilty about their status and privileges in relation to the polytechnics. For the Government it would have had another substantial effect to recommend it: ending the binary system would permit the application of many of the governing structures and mechanisms developed in connection with the polytechnics to the old universities as well, and thus, so to speak, help bring them to heel. Our study suggests that is what is happening now. There is a strange irony here: as the polytechnics emerged from the tutelage of the CNAA they enjoyed a brief period of academic autonomy, only to lose it as they became universities and again found their work being assessed by agencies of central government.

## The search for a "bottom line"

Where does assessment come into this? One problem in patterning universities on the model of private business and industry is that the latter have a fairly simple bottom line of productivity and profitability, a bottom line that allows all observers to see how a concern is meeting its competitive environment. But British universities in the past have not had to compete for resources, nor do they have any very clear or obvious bottom line that government can use in assessing the institutions' performance. The extraordinary focus in government policy on "quality" in higher education—in a system in which it has not in this century been problematic, and where no responsible observer saw major problems — is part of the government's search for a bottom line, a way of assessing individual and group performance in the absence of the ability to assess a university's "success" or "profitability".

If market mechanisms and indicators in higher education are weak, or were made to be weak, that has made it all the more necessary to find some way of developing indicators of desired performance. Of these there were only two the government could imagine: one was the amount (and quality) of research academics and their departments and institutions would produce; the other is the amount and quality of their "teaching." The assessment of "research" has been going on for a few years, and it is having a variety of effects on the behaviours of academics both in the old and the new universities, as we have suggested above.

But the Government is currently also introducing a "bottom line" into the teaching work of academics, and will try to assess and reward it as it does research. As I have suggested, I do not believe teaching can be assessed and rewarded by external agencies in any way that actually links rewards to "excellence" in teaching. Of course, a system linking assessments of "teaching" to rewards can be invented and put into operation. But it requires efforts to shift British academics from the internal motivations associated with professional work — intrinsic work norms, and the desire for a good reputation

among one's peers — to the external motivations that these managers believe are characteristic of private business and industry: the rewards of departmental and institutional grants for superior teaching that are deployed by the funding agency. While the assessment of teaching in the universities by the funding agency is just getting under way, it is perhaps not too soon to see this as the next step of a systematic effort to make universities into "knowledge shops" run in business-like ways, without all the traditional norms and values that (in the view of Government) has crippled British higher education, and reduced its contribution to national economic development.

This effort by central government requires — indeed it assumes — the subordination of inner motivations to external incentives linked to these assessments. It can also be seen as requiring the deprofessionalization of the academic work force, their transformation into middle managers or skilled craftsmen, interested in promotion and better pay as rewards for better performance as determined by external assessors against yardsticks supplied by government agencies. It also means that these skilled workmen are producing and delivering a more or less standardised product subject, as in other industries, to control by management of costs and quality. That process of deprofessionalization is already under way as a natural and inevitable consequence of the withdrawal of trust by government in the universities and their guilds of academics.

For example, in the assessment of teaching by the funding councils, a central criterion, as one senior official in a funding council recently put it, is whether the teacher "delivers the course the customer (i.e. the student) expected to get". In this conception of the academic's role, the teacher produces a product which the customer buys, and expects to get what he paid for. And that is a reasonably accurate (if partial) description of some parts of higher education: the straightforward transmission of skills and knowledge, where students and teachers share a notion of what skills and knowledge are involved in the transaction. Even there, a good deal more happens in those relationships than is described by that transaction, much of it not part of the student's expectations when they enter the course. But more strikingly, there is no

provision in this conception of "teaching to expectations" for the possibility that the teacher does not want to meet the students' expectations, but wants rather to modify those expectations, and more broadly, to modify (and enlarge) the student's mind, character and sensibility. That is what many British academics think they are doing, or are trying to do; and there is much evidence to suggest that they are remarkably successful, certainly as successful as any group of academics in the world. Nor will they easily surrender those conceptions of teaching, embedded as they are in the norms and of the university and the habits of academics, in response to the quite different assumptions of the external assessment exercises.

If British academics do not easily surrender their own notions of what teaching is about, how will they cope with the pressures of these assessments and their ambiguous criteria? That is what our study is about. We already have heard of various coping mechanisms by the university officers under conditions of high uncertainty: these are variously referred to as "games" and "scams", and involve the creative reporting of numbers and events, all wrapped in what is hoped is persuasive rhetoric that bears a somewhat loose relation to reality. But however "successful" these coping mechanisms, aimed primarily at gaining a workable grant, or at least reducing threatened cuts, one should not imagine that the assessments have little effect. Perhaps their effects are achieved most powerfully through their criteria which, however resented, come over time to be internalised, and through the values implicit in the language in which discussions of teaching and learning are carried on in official papers.

## Diversity and a typology of orientations to teaching

Let us look briefly at the nature of teaching in universities, to see whether it is reasonable to expect committees of the funding council to be able to assess the teaching performance of academic staff and departments in ways that will allow government to rationally link institutional funding to the quality of teaching.

We can see some of the difficulties more clearly if we consider just one way of characterising teachers by reference to their relationships with students, that is, by looking at four familiar but distinguishable patterns of teaching styles. Let us look at the four styles generated by the cross tabulation of two simple dimensions of teachers' orientations towards teaching. One dimension distinguishes the orientation of teachers primarily towards their students or towards their subjects. The other dimension distinguishes between teachers who are oriented more towards the transmission of knowledge, or towards the creation of knowledge. These two dimensions then define four familiar types of orientations of academics toward teaching.

| | Typology of orientations toward teaching | |
|---|---|---|
| Orientation toward | subject | student |
| transmitting knowledge | I | II |
| creating knowledge | III | IV |

Type I reflects a traditional teacher-student relationship: "I know my subject, and I will teach you about it." The subject, an academic discipline or the explicit aspects of a profession, is what competent scholars and scientists have said and learned about the substance of the field, about its "theories" and its methodologies. The assumption is that the student is motivated

to learn, and the teacher's task is to provide expert guidance about what is of greatest importance in the literature, and to help the student to learn how to read it.

Type II is a more "modern" or "progressive" orientation towards teaching, since it no longer assumes a high measure of motivation on the part of the student, and accepts that a considerable part of the teacher's job is to motivate the student to learn. This may require "non-traditional" forms of instruction, most commonly finding a way to involve the student's own experience in the subject so as to make them see the relevance of it for their own lives and future. This orientation is a natural concomitant of the growth of broader access and mass higher education. It emerged earlier among teachers in the primary and secondary schools, (and even earlier in the schools and departments of education) with the lengthening of the school leaving age and the growth in the population of reluctant and resistant students. This perspective lies at the heart of the Copernican revolution in education[8] that transformed American pedagogy in the schools as far back as the turn of the century. Its late arrival in British higher education reflects that society's long resistance to the incorporation of institutions of mass higher education into full university status. That has now happened, and we will be seeing the characteristics of Type II teaching gradually emerge as the criteria of "quality" in teaching employed by the new teaching assessment bodies.

Types III and IV, which centre teaching around the creation of knowledge, are the natural orientations of research scholars and scientists who specialise in teaching post-graduate students: they are the orientations of people who see existing knowledge primarily as a way of gaining knowledge — the knowledge one needs to have in order to advance it. For such teachers the transmission of knowledge is, so to speak, a by-product of

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[8] This refers to the replacement of the subject by the student at the centre of the universe of teaching. The metaphor is found in the seminal writings of Lawrence Cremin, the distinguished historian of American education. See Cremin, "The Revolution in American Secondary Education, 1893-1918", *Teachers College Record*, Vol. LVI (1955), No. 6, p. 303.

learning how to create it. But the lines are not clear. In the great research universities in both the U.K. and the U.S. research scholars and scientists also teach undergraduates. Such research oriented academics often cannot change their perspectives on their subjects just because their students are undergraduates, and teach the latter as if they were graduate students, though with lower expectations about the undergraduates' performance or their contributions to knowledge. Such teachers assume a measure of motivation to learn whether it is there or not; "if they aren't motivated they shouldn't be here". That perspective is assailed as "elitist" by supporters of mass higher education who know that whatever its other virtues, it brings larger numbers of more weakly motivated students into higher education.

These two different orientations (Types III and IV) are typically assumed by research scholars depending on how far advanced their research students are in their preparation for research. Research scholars and scientists teaching students in the first year or so of their graduate studies may well stress the nature of knowledge in their subject, assuming, as they might well do with respect to postgraduate students, that they are motivated to learn (Type III). The other orientation (Type IV) is assumed by teachers (usually graduate advisors and mentors) who may try to learn the unique qualities of an advanced research student's mind and talents, and shape their relationship increasingly more in response to each student's interests and qualities than merely to the subject alone.

Matters are a little different when these orientations are held by teachers of undergraduates. In the United States teaching undergraduates through direct exposure to research is sometimes decried as at variance with the nature of liberal education, and the gaining of a broad sense of the map of knowledge. Education oriented around research is inherently specialised, since academic research and the advance of knowledge is specialised. And research scholars are sometimes unable to drop their intense orientation toward creating knowledge as they face a classroom of undergraduates. But there is evidence that involving students directly in the research activities of their teachers has great potential for motivating them to want to

learn, as they see at first hand the intrinsic rewards of the pursuit of knowledge, as well as some of the disciplines associated with it. The broad success of the Undergraduate Research Opportunities Programme at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), which involves a very large proportion of MIT undergraduates in live on-going research under the direction of a research scientist at some point during their studies, attests to that. But MIT students can be assumed to be highly motivated; similar programmes at the University of California and Stanford have had marked success with minority students from educationally weak backgrounds which required that their motivation be engendered rather than assumed before their real education could begin.

There are several points to be made about this typology of orientations toward teaching. First, it is a typology of orientations and not of people; individuals may have different orientations when facing different kinds of students — as for example, graduates and undergraduates. Secondly, teachers may combine some of these kinds of orientations in their teaching — for example, a teacher intensely interested in creating knowledge may do it in part through a focus on where the frontiers of knowledge are, and how the specific student can be brought there (III and IV). Or a bookish teacher, focused on his subject and rather insensitive or uninterested in variations among his students, may discuss the field in his lectures and seminars both in terms of how the knowledge in the field is understood and organised by the discipline, and also how that area of knowledge is currently being advanced through research (I and III).

Third, teachers change over time; their orientations towards their fields and towards their students may also change and move from box to box.

Fourth, and important for my argument, all of these orientations can be found in our lecture halls and seminar rooms currently. Moreover, the diversity of orientations reflects the growing diversity of student interests, talents and ambitions. All this means that there is no single dimension along which teaching can be assessed as "unsatisfactory" to "excellent". Put

differently, a university will have, and indeed will want to have, people with all these kinds of orientations to teaching — teachers more concerned with their subject than with their students, teachers more concerned with creating knowledge than in transmitting it, and the other kinds too. And they are present, though not in the same distributions everywhere, in almost every kind of college and university. In the old polytechnics there are more transmitters than creators; in some fields teachers are more likely to be focused on the student than on the subject. But all these kinds of teachers are there in their variety, resisting all efforts to assess them as if teaching were a performance, the performance of a skill that can be assessed and graded. As we who have taught and done research know, teaching and learning are not like that, not like that at all.

## On the long delay of effects

There are other forces besides the diversity of teacher-learner relationships that defeat efforts at assessment. One of these is the difficulty of knowing what the effects of teaching will be on the student over his or her lifetime. All of us have had the experience of reassessing our experience in college or university during the course of our lives, reflecting on how empty or ephemeral were some courses of study, how enduring in their influence on our thinking and feeling were others. And how different those later assessments are in many cases from the feelings we had about those teachers and their courses or seminars when we experienced them, in most cases before we were 25 years old.

Evidence for this beyond the anecdotal is provided in a study by Katherine Trow, who has recently interviewed a group of 40 graduates who had gone through a particular course of study at University College Berkeley 20 to 25 years earlier.[9] Almost uniformly these people in their 40s reported that they had been influenced during their lives after they left the University by their experience of that particular course of study and reading. But while the experience had this continuing influence, it also underwent a reassessment by the students — one that is not yet finished.

One former student, now a businessman, describes the effects for him of that particular programme of study as "an intellectual net that has stretched over time". Another graduate, now a lawyer, observed that "As I've grown older, the impact sort of accumulated .... I remember somebody saying in 1967 or 1968 that 'you won't know about the truth of what we're saying, you're just children now'. And of course we were. But what's happened for me is that the longer I've lived with these books ...

[9] Katherine Trow, "The Experimental College Program at Berkeley: Some of its Long Term Effects and Implications for Educational Practice", Council for the Renewal of Undergraduate Education, Stockholm, Sweden, 1992.

the more I see [their relevance] in my life, and also in terms of my overview of history and culture and the present." And he goes on to say what we all know, but cannot measure: "As you get older, you just know more, and you live more, and you have suffered more losses, and you have more sense of the complexity of the world and then you start to see.... You read a poem of Yeats when you are fifteen or sixteen or seventeen, and you read a poem of Yeats now and... you can have it now; you couldn't have it then." We cannot disentangle the impact of what that man read at Berkeley 25 years ago, or of the peculiar talents of his teachers, from what he has become since, or from all his life experience. But he has come to "have more sense of the complexity of the world", and grapples with it as his teachers twenty-five years ago hoped he would. What he read was at least in part what they put in his way — and they put those readings and ideas in his way in such a fashion that he did not discard them, but is still living and struggling with them a quarter of a century later. My point is not to praise a liberal education, however much it needs praising. My point is that whatever is happening in a relationship between a student and his teachers (and other students and the broader academic environment), assessment teams cannot measure those effects while the students are still, in a sense, children, and not even very precisely later on, when the effects of education are mixed with all the experiences of life. The measurement of the effects of education in the short term may be crucial to the "bottom line", but it is an illusion.

## Conclusion

In my critical discussion of trends in central government policy toward higher education in the U.K. it should be clear that I believe that a university should be continually engaged in critical reviews of its own activities and departments. I have pointed to the great danger that the criteria of "success" or "quality" adopted in external "quality assessments" or reviews tend be chosen with an eye to the possibilities of the quantitative measurement of "quality", since those measures seem to be more "objective", are more easily accepted outside the institution, and are part of the ethos of managerialism. The paradoxical result may well be that vigorous efforts by agencies of central government to assess the quality of university work lead to its decline, as more and more energy is spent on bureaucratic reports, and as university activities themselves begin to adapt to the simplifying tendencies of the quantification of outputs. Our research suggests that departments and individuals shape their activities to what "counts" in the assessments, to the impoverishment of the life of the university, which is always more complex and varied than assessments of "outputs" can capture.

The only effective defence by the university against this tendency is to create procedures for review and maintenance of the quality of teaching and research which are firmly rooted in the intellectual life of the institution and its academic departments and members. And that in turn calls for a process of continual assessment through procedures and committees which work with departments and not against them, which try to understand the university and its departments qualitatively as well as quantitatively, and which co-ordinate its internal assessments in ways that are in the service of its intellectual life. The members of such committees, most of whom should be drawn from units outside the departments under review, must learn enough about those departments and programmes to be able to recommend directions of development and corrective action, not merely give them scores. And those recommendations to senior academic officers should have consequences for the internal allocation of the university's resources.

In the U.K., the greatly strengthened administrative leadership of universities which has grown out of the movement I have called "soft managerialism" is the best defence of university autonomy, and in current circumstances nearly its only defence. Our study shows us how effectively administrators, especially the professional managerial staff, defend their universities in a game whose rules are invented by others and are constantly changing. But the continuing decline of the unit of resource widens the gulf between administration and the academic staff. There are under the best of circumstances inevitable tensions between administrators and academics, arising out of their different values and interests. In most universities that is a healthy tension — between spontaneity and predictability, creativity and accountability, centrifugal and centripetal forces. But it makes all the difference to the life of the institution whether the administrators who "manage" the university and take responsibility for the whole of it are inside or outside it.

In criticising the current trend toward the external assessments of educational quality, and in seeing them as more the product of an ideology of managerialism than as a way of improving the quality of education, I do not mean to suggest that the quality of higher education cannot or should not be improved. Indeed, a strong case can be made that higher education, both in teaching and research, is facing a grave crisis, for some aspects of which we academics must be held responsible. And teachers can be helped to be more effective, whatever their orientations toward teaching, whatever their talents and temperaments, as many successful programmes of staff development attest.

But some of the fundamental problems facing the academic world currently are only partly of our making, and not wholly in our power to correct. I need only refer to the collapse of consensus about the nature of the cultural disciplines, and the loss of confidence that any scholarship affords any authority to assert anything. The deconstructionists continue to threaten to saw off the limb on which they are sitting. Even in fields not so devastated, the extreme specialisation of studies arising out of the explosion of knowledge atomises the curriculum, and undermines any coherence in higher education. The incoherence of undergraduate studies in the United States results also from

the modularization of courses, and the freedom students have to elect among these modules in their accumulation of credits toward their degree, where again we were pioneers. And British universities move rapidly (if variably) toward modularization. Modularization gives students the freedom to drop in and out of universities, move from subject to subject and from institution to institution over their whole lives, banking their unit credits in academic transcripts. How admirable (and indeed necessary) are these mechanisms of mass higher education, how wonderfully responsive to the diversity of student talents and preferences and to societal needs. And yet, with what consequences for the character of higher education?

Beyond this, what is happening to our students, and to their inclination and capacity to study what we present to them as worthy of study? We slowly begin to recognise the effects of thousands of hours of TV and computer games on young minds, not just on the minds of school drop-outs but also on the minds of our students. A recent commentator suggests that "The problem here is the emergence of widespread aliteracy — a growth in the number of people who, although they can read, do not see reading as a pleasurable activity". And he notes that "In 1976 in Britain, 83 per cent of those between the age of 15 and 24 regularly read a daily paper, but by 1992 this had fallen to 59 per cent".[10] And this was happening as the proportion of the age grade staying on through upper secondary school and entering universities was growing rapidly.

These great problems facing academic, indeed intellectual, life — profound failures of nerve in some fields of inquiry, the explosive growth, transformation and atomisation of knowledge in others, the impact of mass culture on mass higher education — these and similar problems fall quite outside the "assessment of teaching" as the Higher Education Funding Council (England) imagines it. Managerialism, at least in its hard version, may allow governments to imagine that they control the

[10] Richard Woods, "No quick cure for newspapers suffering from poor circulation", *The Independent*, 4 August 1993, p.17.

uncontrollable. But for academics it is at best an irrelevance and a distraction from the daily business of teaching and learning, and at worst a serious threat to already vulnerable institutions. Once again, it may be that the major task facing British higher education is to educate its masters.

# *A Commentary*

*Paul Clark*

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The paper '*Managerialism and the Academic Profession*', given by Professor Martin Trow to the conference on *The Quality Debate* in September 1993, presents a wide-ranging analysis of the evolution of the higher education system in the U.K. over the course of the twentieth century as well as setting out a set of concerns about the role and functioning of a quality assessment system linked to funding decisions in relation to this evolution. My response is to recognise the general thrust of policy he describes, to question some of his assertions as to the nature of teaching in British higher education prior to the 1980s and to challenge his characterisation of quality assessment within this more general framework.

To orient my comments, I should like to set out the major assertions of Professor Trow's paper as I see them.

(i) Until the 1980s there was in place a higher education (HE) system of the first rank in quality of teaching and research; therefore the government should explain in advance why it feels the need to implement any assessment system in relation to teaching in HE.

(ii) The Government wants to change the fundamental orientation of HE in the U.K. and is using a managerial framework to do so. The managerial framework used is described as 'hard', which I have taken from his description to mean one that is 'top-down', operates on direction and funding allocation against externally determined standards rather than encouraging self-analysis and self-improvement. The programme of Quality Assessment of teaching is part of this framework.

(iii) Teaching in HE cannot be assessed: it can only be improved from the inside.

In the course of elaborating these three points he makes a large number of assertions with which I disagree but a litany of refutation makes poor reading. Therefore I shall examine each of the three assertions and include detailed critique as appropriate.

With respect to his characterisation of British HE prior to the Thatcher managerial onslaught, I think that there are two major

points to make. Firstly, Trow's description of teaching in British HE looks like a 'golden age' view of the grander traditional universities. My experience as a post-graduate student and a beginning lecturer in this system in the 1960s would lead me to say that the teaching was extremely variable, with much excellent teaching sitting alongside the barely competent or incompetent, that there was no evaluation or encouragement to improve the teaching standard and that excellence in teaching was considered much less important for career enhancement than ability in research. When Trow suggests that the inner motivations that lead British academics to aspire to be good teachers also include 'the desire for a good reputation among one's peers', this was not a characteristic of the traditional university system as I experienced it or heard it described by others. Secondly, and more importantly, the HE system that Trow describes as having been universally admired was, as he acknowledges, a very highly resourced system with a select intake (8.3 per cent of the age cohort in 1960). The present HE system is much more diverse, serving a much wider group of students and preparing them for a much wider range of employment and other activity. Therefore, the reputation of British HE before the 1980s is less relevant to today's needs than his references to it would imply.

Trow places his critique of quality assessment in a framework of increasing managerialism in HE, driven by the Government through lack of trust and empathy with the system that was in place up to 1979. His description of the present situation contains the following elements:

- the relation between Government and HE, including quality assessment, is 'hard managerial relation';
- quality assessment is designed to produce a set of ratings that will allow a market relationship to be implemented between the Funding Councils and HE;
- quality assessment of teaching is carried out by 'committees appointed by the funding agency';
- quality assessment of teaching will force academics to become 'skilled workmen... producing a more or less standardised product...';

- quality assessment of teaching will force an evaluation along a single dimension with no allowance for differences in style or intention.

This description simply does not fit the current model of quality assessment of teaching as operated by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). To begin with 'the committees', the assessment panels, are made up of subject specialist assessors, the majority of whom are academics nominated by their universities to work with the Funding Council. The judgements of teaching quality are ultimately their responsibility and these judgements are not rewritten or moderated by any central committee within the Funding Council. Quality assessment is essentially peer review, a much admired feature of British HE; the major change is that the institution does not get the chance to pick all the peers.

In relation to 'standardised products' and 'a single dimension' of quality, the structure of the assessment programme, which starts with the creation of a self-assessment document by the department to be assessed and then orients all subsequent steps in the process to the aims and objectives of that department as set out in the self-assessment, leads in exactly the opposite direction to that described by Trow. The basic document that describes the process, HEFCE Circular 3/93, invites each department to present what it considers quality in education to be, in sharp contrast to an imposition of a single dimension of quality across the system, as Trow seems to suggest. That it is difficult consistently to conduct a peer review process in a mission-sensitive manner may well be true; that is nevertheless the principal objective of quality assessment and the direction in which improvements are aimed.

On pages 34–36 Trow sets out an interesting typology of teaching characteristics but by the bottom of page 37 he is assuming that quality assessment will demand that such a variety be compressed into a single, standard teaching style. Again he has ignored the central feature of the quality assessment process, the creation of the self-assessment in which the case for the particular style or styles of teaching provided by a given department, and the intended outcomes of this variety of

styles, can be presented. In the first year of operation of the quality assessment process, we have coped with styles of teaching as diverse as those of Oxford University and the Open University in the same subject area, so that compression to a norm or standard is not an intended outcome of this system.

In general, if I were designing quality assessment of teaching and learning as a 'hard managerial system' I should not come up with anything like the present model. An externally appointed, permanent corps of inspectors operating with standards set by the Funding Council, whose judgements are not subject to any appeal, would be more in the 'hard managerial' image. An external corps of inspectors, on the model of HMI, was rejected by the HE sector when it was consulted on the matter, and its response was respected in the development of the current arrangements. In fact, with its emphasis on the self-assessment as the guiding framework for quality assessment and in its invitation to each department to set out its views on quality of teaching and learning, the present system is much more 'bottom-up' oriented than any 'top-down, hard managerial' system would ever allow itself to be. Whatever hard managerial relations exist between Government, the Funding Councils and the HE sector, quality assessment is not one of them.

In the final section of his paper, Trow sets out the 'only effective defence' for a university is to:

- 'create procedures for review and maintenance of the quality of teaching and research which are firmly rooted in the intellectual life of the institution and its academic departments and members';
- (maintain) 'a process of continual assessment through procedures and committees which work with departments';
- (create committees with members) 'most of whom are external to the department, who learn about the departments and the programmes under review and (are) able to recommend directions of development and corrective action...'.

I couldn't ask for anything more! When university departments carry out processes of self-analysis and development such as

these on a routine basis, then they will find the process of quality assessment much less time-consuming since most of what the Funding Council asks of them will already have been done. Further, the responsibilities that Professor Trow gives to the review committees are very much those of the assessment panels of the present quality assessment method. With this in mind, I come to the final point of my summary of Professor Trow's position, that teaching in HE cannot be assessed. With his model of assessment I can see why he would hold that view; with the model he gives at the end of this paper, I believe that he can see why we hold that properly aimed and organised quality assessment of teaching and learning is both possible and beneficial. I believe that the present quality assessment process for teaching and learning is guiding departments towards the development models that Professor Trow describes and I hope that the continued evolution of both quality assessment and reflective analysis and improvement by institutions will converge towards a new 'golden age' in British higher education.

# *Other QSC Publications*

***Higher Education Digest***

A regular compilation of information about recent higher education developments. *Annual subscription (three issues) £16.50, overseas £19.00.*

Higher education is changing rapidly - not only in the UK but all over the world. Reading the *Higher Education Digest* is an effective means of keeping up-to-date and informed about new developments and issues which affect higher education. Since the first issue in 1987, the *Digest* has become one of the most widely read publications by academics, administrators and managers within higher education. It is also of interest to people in other sectors of education, in industry and in government who wish to keep abreast of the latest higher education developments.

Each issue contains over 50 items, ranging from general educational policy to developments within specific disciplines. Items are grouped under general themes such as:

- quality assurance
- teaching, learning and assessment
- curriculum development
- staff development
- policy and funding
- recent statistics
- international developments

It also contains details of forthcoming conferences.

***Questions of Quality: in Europe and Beyond***, QSC Higher Education Report No. 1, John Brennan and Frans van Vught, October 1993, price £7.50.

This report contains two papers which examine international aspects of quality in higher education from contrasting perspectives.

The first paper entitled 'Higher education quality: a European dimension' is by John Brennan, Head of the Quality Support Centre. It looks at the various 'needs' and 'opportunities' for higher education institutions to be active in Europe and the implications for quality which they raise. It goes on to review the results of recent studies of the comparative quality of educational programmes in several European countries.

The second paper is entitled 'Towards a general model of quality assessment in higher education', by Frans van Vught, Director of the Centre for Higher Education Policy Studies at the Dutch University of Twente. It examines the various systems of quality assessment and assurance which have been developed in North America and Western Europe and, out of them, sets out a general model of quality assessment in higher education.

***Peer Review and the Assessment of Higher Education Quality***, QSC Higher Education Report No. 3, John Brennan, Elaine El-Khawas and Tarla Shah, forthcoming, price £7.50.

This report is the result of an international project on the role of peer review in assessing quality in higher education. The project was undertaken jointly by the American Council on Education and the Quality Support Centre of the Open University in the UK.

The rationale for the project derived from the widespread international interest in new forms of public accountability for the activities of higher education institutions. Some of these forms indicate shifts in the balance of power and control between higher education and the state and its agencies. Central to these shifts is the role assigned to peer review, frequently regarded as the traditional mechanism of academic self-regulation. Yet peer review remains a somewhat vague and ill-defined concept.

The project has set out to describe the main variations in the practice of peer review as used by over twenty agencies - primarily in Europe and the United States - which, in different ways, occupy boundaries between higher education and other parts of society, most notably the state and the labour market.

John Brennan and Tarla Shah are Head and Administrator respectively of the Quality Support Centre, Open University, and Elaine El-Khawas is Vice President for Policy Analysis and Research in the American Council on Education.

***Quality and Europe: Papers presented at a conference held in London on 29 November 1993***, forthcoming, Greta Bradley and Brenda Little (Eds), price £7.50.

These papers are from a conference organised by QSC on the theme "Quality and Europe".

Three main issues underlay the conference theme, viz: the mutual recognition of qualifications and periods of study to facilitate student and graduate mobility within Europe; the importance of foreign language competence in breaking down economic and cultural barriers within the Community; and the development of a European dimension in higher education.

The aim of the conference was to explore UK experience of these developments to date, to take stock of difficulties and successes encountered, and to be mindful of ways forward for the future. These issues are dealt with in varying degrees in the papers and, interestingly, with a degree of complementarity between papers.

The overview paper by the editors not only draws on the conference papers, but also on comments received from the floor and from the formal written feedback, in order to highlight those issues which had a resonance throughout the day and which seemed to indicate key pointers for the future.

***Towards a Methodology for Comparative Quality Assessment in European Higher Education***, J L Brennan, L C J Goedegebuure, T Shah, D F Westerheijden, P J M Weusthof, 1992, CNAA/QSC/OU, CHEPS, HIS, price £7.00.

This CNAA publication from 1992 has been reprinted by QSC. It examines the possibility of making reliable and valid comparisons of the quality of higher education courses in different European countries. It contains the results of a comparative study of ten economics programmes in England, Germany and The Netherlands which involved an international peer review by leading economists.

***A Guide to the Changes in UK Higher Education***, 1993, Quality Support Centre, price £3.00.

The Guide contains details of the Higher Education Quality Council, the Quality Assessment Divisions of the English, Scottish and Welsh Higher Education Funding Councils, a Who's Who in Quality, and a complete list of universities and colleges in the United Kingdom. It also contains an article on European Quality Assurance.

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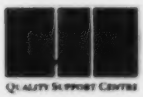


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